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# The Holy, Non-Christic Biblical Subtexts in *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and *Superman II* (1981)

## **Abstract**

The sacred-secular parallels between Jesus Christ and Kal-El/Clark Kent/Superman in *Superman: The Movie* (1978) and *Superman II* (1981) were explicated previously in *JR&F*. Despite the persuasive Christic subtext, the richness of the biblical parallels within these two SF films did not stop with just an alien Messiah. Further engineered biblical correspondences existed that complemented the Christic subtext and uprated the overall sanctity of the filmic narratives. Three areas of holy infranarratives were identified and explicated pertaining to: (a) divine figurations, (b) blessed parents, and (c) holy associates. Further research into this exciting field was recommended.

## Introduction

In "Superman as Christ-Figure: The American Pop Culture Movie Messiah," Anton Karl Kozlovic<sup>1</sup> explicated the sacred-secular parallels between Jesus Christ and Kal-El/Clark Kent/Superman (Christopher Reeve) in *Superman: The Movie* (aka *Superman* hereafter *S1*) and its partial back-to-back sequel *Superman II* (hereafter *S2*).<sup>2</sup> However, despite its very persuasive Christic subtext, the richness of the biblical parallels within these two science fiction (SF) films did not stop with an alien Messiah. Further biblical correspondences existed that complemented the Christic subtext and further uprated the overall sanctity of the filmic narratives through an interlocking series of religious associations. Indeed, many commentators have noted these associations, but none have collated and presented it together until now. Three broad areas of the holy, but non-Christic, Bible-film correspondences were identified and explicated herein pertaining to: (a) the divine figurations, (b) the blessed parents, and (c) the holy associates of Superman.

### 1.0 The Divine Figurations: Heavens Above

#### 1.1 Jor-El as God/Father Figure

Both David Bruce<sup>3</sup> and Patrick Anderson<sup>4</sup> considered Jor-El (Marlon Brando) to be the God-like/Father-figure. Their observations have merit because

his Godly status was confirmed in at least twelve different ways throughout *SI* and *S2*. For example.

**1.1.1** Cinematographically, the "camera always looks up at Jor-El, often alone in the frame, a commanding presence even within the group of judges."<sup>5</sup> He is somewhat likened to a "wise patriarch,"<sup>6</sup> "the wisest of its many wise men,"<sup>7</sup> in fact, he is one of Krypton's greatest scientists (just like God, the master scientist), who oozed power, integrity and monumental solemnity as befitting a God-figure.

**1.1.2** Jor-El is repeatedly associated with the colour white, the iconic signature colour of the Divine, and which is biblically used to symbolise "holiness and righteousness."<sup>8</sup> Whether it is Jor-El's glowing, silvery-white, phantasmagoric costume "made up of thousands of light-sensitive beads"<sup>9</sup> to generate his aura of etherealness, or his snow-white hair with trademark Superman forelock (but minus God's flowing white beard in the usual biblical portraiture tradition).<sup>10</sup> The ambient light surrounding him is also frequently white, thus suggesting a cloud-like heavenly environment (and itself symbolic of God's domain); albeit, generated by fog and steam machines to add a smouldering quality to the film set.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Martha Kent was described by Clark as "silver-haired" but not grey-haired in *SI*, thus symbolically indicating in a very subtle way the divine worthiness of both his surrogate Earth mother and his biological Kryptonian father.

**1.1.3** Biblically speaking, God manifested on Earth as "a voice from heaven" (Mark 1:11),<sup>12</sup> "a voice [which] came out of the cloud" (Mark 9:7). Similarly, Jor-El was a disembodied voice with accompanying cloud-faced imagery in *S1* as he tried to stop Superman from dramatically interfering with humanity during the Man of Steel's angst-driven, sky flight. No explanation for this sky voice phenomenon was attempted in the film, it was just accepted as a property of the God-like Jor-El. Indeed, this cloud association in the context of Jor-El's disapproval was apt for a second time because, biblically speaking, cloud(s) are symbols "associated with God's judgments."<sup>13</sup>

**1.1.4** Thematically speaking, Jor-El is "a perfect father/God image, the giver of life and the source of wisdom,"<sup>14</sup> especially as Kal-El's counsellor during his infant journey to Earth, and then as a young man during his twelve years of instruction in the secret Fortress of Solitude retreat." In a poignant moment in *S2*, a de-powered, un-costumed Superman (but dressed as Clark Kent) cried out in anguish "Father!" and "I need you." This resonated with Jesus's anguished cry of "Abba, Father" (Mark 14:36) during a similar private moment in a similar private retreat (i.e., the garden of Gethsemane) during a similar distressing time (i.e., fear of future events).

**1.1.5** Jor-El promised to watch over Kal-El (just like God watched over Jesus), and he did so through his holographic intermediary, whether on board the

star-shaped starship, or within the remote Fortress of Solitude, or elsewhere on planet Earth. Indeed, Jor-El was choked with pride over the accomplishments of his son in *S2*, just like God was pleased with Jesus, and who at his baptism said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). No doubt, God will be pleased again when Jesus returns in the Second Coming as the man of tomorrow. Ironically, before Superman was known as the "Man of Steel" in his comic book incarnation, he was called the "Man of Tomorrow."<sup>15</sup>

**1.1.6** The casting choice of Marlon Brando as Jor-El was apt because he came from his triumphal successes in *The Godfather* and *The Godfather Part II*, and therefore from a "Godfather-figure to God the Father-figure."<sup>16</sup> Brando was always the powerful head of his clan who demonstrated dignity, solemnity and conviction, whether as God, Judge, Father or Don (no doubt helped along by *S1* scriptwriter Mario Puzo who also wrote the *Godfather* novel).

**1.1.7** As a powerful authority figure on Krypton, Jor-El's first lines in *S1* are: "This is no fantasy, no careless product of wild imagination." The sentiments of this statement is also what is strongly believed by fundamentalist Christians about the Bible (as the word of God), and the deeds of Jesus Christ contained therein whom Edward Mehek labelled as "the ultimate hero...a superman among us."<sup>17</sup>

**1.1.8** Sarah Kozloff considered that Jor-El's "name is similar to "Jehovah",<sup>18</sup> the personal name of God. However, linguistically speaking, more interesting is the "El" in Jor-El, because it is the Hebrew word for "God, Lord."<sup>19</sup> Thereby, directly implying the divinity of both Jor-El and his son Kal-El as super-males, but not the "El"-less female Lara (Superman's biological mother), the Kryptonian correlate of the earthly Virgin Mary (i.e., blessed companion but not divine per se).

**1.1.9** Indeed, Michael Shapiro (1994, p. 374) thought that Kal-El was "a curiously Hebraic-sounding alien,"<sup>20</sup> a comment no doubt rooted in the Jewish origins of Superman's creators, Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster. This pair of cartoonists ranked 100<sup>th</sup> in Shapiro's list of the one hundred most influential Jews of all time, which also included Moses and Jesus. Considering Jesus's claim that: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30), then Kal-El's name (i.e., Superman's birth name) also has divine significance. As Gary Engle sagely elaborated:

The morpheme Kal bears a linguistic relation to two Hebrew roots. The first, kal, means "with lightness" or "swiftness" (faster than a speeding bullet in Hebrew?). It also bears a connection to the root hal, where h is the guttural ch of chutzpah. Hal translates roughly as "everything" or "all." Kal-el, then, can be read as "all that is God," or perhaps more in the spirit of the myth of Superman, "all that God is." And while we're at it, Kent is a form of the Hebrew kana. In its k-n-t form, the word appears in the Bible, meaning "I have found a son."<sup>21</sup>

**1.1.10** Jor-El's starship instruction lessons referred to twenty-eight known galaxies. This fact was irrelevant to the storyline and had no filmic consequences in either *S1* or *S2*, however, it did resonate with Jesus's claim that: "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2). Nor was Jor-El averse to exposing Kal-El to Chinese philosophy as part of his developing intellectual growth. The use of overt pagan philosophy for God's (Christian) ends was also an important pedagogic tactic used by the Apostle Paul (Acts 17:22-23,28).

**1.1.11** Other forms of pseudo-biblical rhetoric were cultivated in *S1*, especially Jor-El's blessing of Kal-El before his hasty departure from the doomed Krypton. Namely, "We will never leave you...All that I've learned, everything that I feel, I bequeath you. You will carry me inside you all the days of your life...The son becomes the father and the father the son."<sup>22</sup> "At this point the script sounds as if it might have been ghost-written by the author of the Gospel of John,"<sup>23</sup> especially considering Jesus's claim: "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30). Indeed, in Mario Puzo's original script, he (unsuccessfully) suggested that Jor-El and Superman be played by the same actor to dramatically reinforce this oneness thematic.<sup>24</sup>

**1.1.12** The intimate bond between Jor-El and Kal-El was also filmicly reinforced by their identical costume symbol. On Krypton, Jor-El has the "S" logo emblazoned on the chest of both his official black velvet caftan and his unofficial white jump suit. Similarly, Superman bore the same "S" logo upon the manly chest



of his tricot coloured flying suit comprising of cobalt blue, scarlet red and canary yellow, but this time as his family crest-cum-Earth-trademark for Superman, the Man of Steel. This was a deliberate act crafted by the filmmakers "to further establish both the real and symbolic bond between father and son."<sup>25</sup>

## **1.2 Lara as the Holy Spirit**

David Bruce<sup>26</sup> considered Jor-El's wife Lara (Susannah York) to be a Holy Spirit-figure, one of the intimate holy three (1 Peter 1:2). In *S2*, Lara is subsequently revealed as the "keeper of the archives of Krypton" and thus a vessel for Kryptonian wisdom, knowledge and other sagely advice. She can answer Kal-El's questions with insight and authority, just like the Holy Spirit who, as the spirit of truth, can guide one in all truth (John 16:13). Indeed, in Catholic theology, the Holy Spirit is referred to as the "Love of God personified."<sup>27</sup> This truth-and-love role was dramatically reinforced during her holographic heart-to-heart talk with Superman before he voluntarily stripped himself of his super powers for love of Lois Lane (Margot Kidder).

Lara was initially in her spirit-like form within the Kryptonian imaging crystal inside the Fortress of Solitude, but later she externalised into Superman's earthly world by literally stepping out of the crystal to greet him. In her personified loving role, she accepted Superman's "depowering" decision. This act is also similar

to the ethereal nature of the Holy Spirit who, in a literal reading, externalised in the form of a dove who came out of the heavens at a similar status changing moment - Jesus's baptism (Matt. 3:16). The Godly acceptance of Jesus's decision was the beginning of his new earthly path, and upon which he would be functionally inhibited in the use of any self-serving miraculous abilities beyond God's will (aka Matt. 26:52-54).

### **1.3 The Green Crystal as the Holy Spirit**

Alternatively, Sarah Kozloff<sup>28</sup> considered the glowing green crystal in Superman's Fortress of Solitude to be analogous to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity (alongside God-the-Father and Jesus-the-Son). Especially considering: (a) its strange, ethereal emanations, (b) its people comforting function, (c) its Kryptonian (heavenly) origins, and (d) its special placement within Kal-El's spaceship by a very loving Jor-El. As indicated above, the Holy Spirit in Catholic theology is referred to as the "Love of God personified."<sup>29</sup> This loving role was most dramatically enacted in *S2*.

A de-powered Superman desperately returned to the Fortress of Solitude to recharge his spiritual batteries. The alien "Messiah may have fallen, but now seeks redemption."<sup>30</sup> After Superman cried out in anguish to his "Father," the green crystal miraculously appeared in the background, as if left on the Fortress floor

carelessly (instead of a more honoured place given its guiding gift-from-Jor-El nature, and/or a key architectural location given its fantastic Fortress-building abilities). While on the floor, it emitted its usual green glow and came to symbolise hope, guidance and restoration for the dejected Superman. Although not directly depicted on screen, it is assumed to have helped him become the redeemed, fully-powered Superman again, thus indirectly emulating the claim of Acts 1:8: "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."

Superman reconsidered the error of his ways and then earnestly sought to do his father's will, a characteristic side effect of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 36:26-27). The green crystal thus deserved the critic's tag of "magic crystal."<sup>31</sup> Its powerful status was also enhanced by the ethereal, otherworldly quality of the Fortress's crystalline construction that appeared to have the fragility of glass sculpture. The Fortress was a heavenly abode on Earth and thus a fit place for a spiritual entity to reside within. Indeed, architecturally speaking, Superman's crystalline Fortress kingdom on Earth physically resembled Jor-El's crystalline kingdom on Krypton (i.e., his home and high council quarters; metaphorically heaven). So much so that when General Zod (Terence Stamp) and his evil cohorts invaded the Fortress in *S2*, he bitterly complained about its dull Kryptonian similarity, which no doubt, also brought back bad memories of his personal failures and imprisonment there.

## **2.0 The Blessed Parents: Divine Surrogates**

### **2.1 Lara as the Virgin Mary**

David Bruce<sup>32</sup> considered that Lara (Jor-El's wife and Kal-El's mother) was a Virgin Mary-figure. Whereas, Sarah Kozloff considered that the "filmmakers have divided the attributes of the Virgin Mary between Lara (Susannah York), Superman's real mother, and Martha Kent (Phyllis Thaxter), Superman's foster mother. Like Jor-El, Lara is endowed with god-like wisdom and compassion, and with her long, flowing hair, she looks like a Raphael Madonna. Martha Kent parallels other facets of Mary."<sup>33</sup> In *S2*, Lara is revealed to be the "keeper of the archives of Krypton" and thus containing considerable wisdom and knowledge, and especially given that Earth was considered to be "thousands of years behind" Krypton, as presumably heaven is compared to Earth.

### **2.2 Martha Clark Kent as the Virgin Mary**

Sarah Kozloff<sup>34</sup> considered that Martha Kent, Superman's foster mother, paralleled other facets of the Virgin Mary, which is also filmically borne out. For example, Jesus's earthly parents were the previously childless Mary and Joseph (Matt. 1:16), an "M" and a "J," who had the privilege of looking after God's son. Likewise, Superman's earthly parents were an "M" and a "J," Martha "Ma" Clark Kent and Jonathan Kent who both looked after Jor-El's son. Nor were these initial parallels only superficial. For example, Martha meant "'lady' or 'mistress'."<sup>35</sup> The

biblical Martha received Jesus into her house, and was both careful and troubled (Luke 10:38,41), just like Superman's foster Ma in both thought and deed during *S1*.

Indeed, in the comic book story of Superman, "the original Mrs. Kent was called Mary, providing fodder for those who choose to see the entire saga as a Christian allegory."<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, Clark only called Martha "mother" instead of "mum," implying formal respect befitting her exalted surrogate status. The linking of Superman with his mother was also verbally hinted at when Jonathan was initially upset with Martha's decision to keep the newly-found baby Kal-El. He emotionally called her "Martha Clark Kent," thus indicating that "Clark Kent" was subsequently named after his surrogate mother, not father, in a defacto matrilineal fashion.

### **2.3 Martha Clark Kent and the Biblical Barren Woman Motif**

Barren woman who are given children by God is a favourite biblical motif, as evidenced by Sarah (aka Sara, Sarai) (Gen. 11:30; 18:10-15; 21:1-2), Rebecca (Gen. 25:21), Elisabeth (Luke 1:7,13,24) and Manoah's unnamed wife, the mother of Samson (Judg. 13:2-5). Similarly, Martha Kent was childless, and there were no other children associated with their family in either *S1* or *S2*. At Kal-El's starship crash site, she confessed to her husband Jonathan that she prayed to the good Lord

for years to give them a child, and now she was excited because Kal-El was miraculously given to her from the heavens. She interpreted this crash event as her Godly prayers having been answered. Interestingly, in the 1942 novel *The Adventures of Superman*, George Lowther rewrote the history of Superman and renamed Mrs. Kent as "Sarah."<sup>37</sup> This was also an appropriate biblical name for not only was Sarah old, barren and given a child by God, Isaac, but she was heralded in the Bible as an example of faith (Is. 51:2; Heb. 11:11). The Apostle Paul even referred to her as the mother of the people of God's promise (Rom. 9:9). Similarly, Mrs. Martha Kent was faithful to Superman and his secret, and was the surrogate mother of Superman whom Jor-El had sent to Earth to help humanity grow as a people. All these biblical female names assigned to her over the years reflected positively upon her and her function and role within the Superman saga.

#### **2.4 Jonathan Kent as Joseph**

Jesus's earthly father was Joseph (Matt. 1:16) who also had the privilege of looking after God's son, albeit for a shorter time than his wife Mary. Similarly, Superman's earthly father was another "J" name, Jonathan "Jon/Pa" Kent (Glenn Ford), and whose name was also religiously significant because Jonathan biblically means: "Yahweh has given."<sup>38</sup> Thus a divinely favoured one, as was Jonathan Kent who also looked after Kal-El for Jor-El, the heavenly Father who "gave" his son to him. Not much is known of the life or death of the Joseph, the biblical surrogate

father. But given that Jesus was scripturally referred to as "the son of Mary" (Mark 6:3) rather than the son of Joseph, "scholars agree that Joseph probably died when Jesus was a youth."<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Clark Kent lost his earthly father Jonathan (due to a heart attack) in his formative teenage years, and which was the trigger for his own self-discovery and earthly cosmic mission.

Interestingly, Clark only called Pa Kent "dad" but not "father," thus implying less formal respect befitting his less exalted status compared to his wife Martha (metaphorically the Virgin Mary). In *SI*, not much was revealed about Jonathan other than he was good, understanding, and wise, as demonstrated by his kind counsel to Clark concerning his indirect showing off of his super powers to his high school peers. Glenn Ford deliberately played Jonathan as "a simple, midwestern, salt-of-the-earth fellow."<sup>40</sup> Structurally speaking, the "death of the surrogate father frees Clark to leave his mother and is a necessary step in his evolution as a hero."<sup>41</sup> This rationale may also help explain why Joseph mysteriously suffered a textual death within the Bible, especially given the sacred text preference for brevity.

## 2.5 Other Parental Parallels

Jesus's earthly parents, Mary and Joseph were good and pious but of: (a) lowly birth (i.e., non-powerful); (b) lowly station (i.e., vocationally, a carpenter and

his wife); and (c) living in an unimportant location, as evidenced by Nathanael's claim: "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Similarly, Superman's earthly parents, Martha and Jonathan, were of good but lowly birth, station and locality, as demonstrated by their simple (not simpleton) ways, their non-powerful, down-to-earth farmer occupation, and their sparse rural location that was not indicative of urban sophistication. They lived among beautiful amber waves of grain in (supposedly) the American Mid-West, in a town whose designation was diminutively encoded as "Smallville" (i.e., a wordplay on the theme of non-significance). Indeed, both Martha and Jonathan were wearing their church-best when they found young Kal-El's crashed starship, thus implying Christian piousness on a Sunday. The Lord's day was certainly apt when finding an Earth-bound heavenly son. At Pa Kent's death, Martha wore a Christian cross around her neck and held a red-edged Bible to overtly tag her Christian faith stance.

### **3.0 The Holy Associates: Sacred Friends**

#### **3.1 Lois Lane as Mary Magdalene**

Sarah Kozloff argued that Lois Lane, Clark's reporter peer at the Daily Planet, "roughly parallels Mary Magdalen...the prostitute reformed and converted by Jesus who becomes one of his most faithful followers...Lois Lane...assumes the role of Superman's most devoted and most favoured disciple, and while she is not presented as a prostitute ...she is repeatedly associated with sex."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, both *SI*



and S2 are saturated with sexual suggestiveness regarding Lois, whether directly, indirectly, covertly, symbolically or metaphorically. For example:

**3.1.1** In *SI*, the "Magdalen Lois Lane"<sup>43</sup> wrote an article for the Daily Planet about a rapist that she claimed contained sex, violence and the ethnic angle (i.e., painful, transgressive overtones with exotic erotic resonances about the Other). Later, she wrote another related newspaper piece, a profile about a sex maniac (i.e., again implying wild and dangerous eroticism) that Perry White editorially corrected by saying: "There's no 'z' in brassiere. " Thereby, invoking further female erotic associations, especially in the context of a sex maniac story. Indeed, brassieres are clothing icons of female sexuality that imply the worldly containment of a powerful natural sexual force. Lois is certainly no stranger to sexual subject matters, and she was obviously professionally concerned with keeping her newspaper readers abreast of sexual issues.

**3.1.2** During her formal interview of Superman at her penthouse apartment, Lois asked a series of double entendre questions. For example, she curiously asked if Superman was married, had a girlfriend, how big (i.e., not "tall") he was, and if his other bodily functions were in working order (with their embarrassingly clear sexual implications that was filmically recognised by both of them). To test Superman's X-ray vision, Lois asked what colour underwear she was wearing, thus forcing him to examine her most intimate sexual wares, with underwear itself being

another iconic symbol of sexuality. (Interestingly, when Margot Kidder won the Lois Lane part, she celebrated by going to Beauchamp Place to buy lots of silk underwear, nor was she trapped by modesty limitations in her real life).<sup>44</sup> To her erotic test question, Superman eventually replied "pink" accompanied with a subtle non-verbal hint of his intimate knowingness (and the uncomfortably possibility of her having been visually raped by his x-ray eyes). Later, she asked if he liked the colour pink (now a flesh coloured metaphor for her sexual wares). Superman enthusiastically confirmed it (and his own heterosexuality). It was a stereotypic hot-blooded American response full of sexual promise, especially for a man wearing brightly coloured "underwear" on the outside of his tights, and thus engaging in his own game of sexual display.

**3.1.3** After her exclusive Superman interview, Lois wrote a newspaper article entitled: "I spent the night with Superman" which itself contained strong sexual connotations of forbidden delights, and deliberately engineered by Lois given her exclusive author status. Lois apparently thought of little else other than sex before, during and after her Superman encounters. Indeed, prior to her earthquake death in *SI*, Lois's car radio is playing a Super Tramp song with the appropriately prophetic lyrics: "give a little bit of my life for you" from "Give A Little Bit" within Super Tramp's *Even in the Quietest Moments* album. Was this choice of song and band meant to subtly imply that Lois was the tramp of Superman

who, prophetically speaking, would give a little bit of her life and sex to Superman (as she did in *S2* during their very quiet moment in the fortress of Solitude)?

**3.1.4** The Mary Magdalen-Jesus Christ association was further reinforced in *S2*. "Iconographically their positions echo those of Magdalen and Christ when he reveals himself to her outside the tomb as depicted in the "Noli me tangere" paintings of Rembrandt, Tritian and others."<sup>45</sup> In *S2*, Superman dropped the self-effacing, hesitant Clark Kent persona, what Gary Engle considered was "the epitome of visible invisibility,"<sup>46</sup> and finally came out of the superhero closet to Lois. Significantly, he did it personally and in private before Lois, while inside a modern day tomb of clear ritual significance traditionally involving a mini death of another pleasurable sort, the Honeymoon Haven. Their hotel room and its many furnishings were saturated with pink shades (as was Lois Lane's outfit during the Eiffel Tower terrorist incident in *S2*, and the colour of her underwear in *S1*). At one point, Lois refused a champagne drink from Clark because of an alleged "kissing contest," thereby evoking sexual intimacy once again. After Clark Kent revealed his true identity as Superman, Lois bluntly claimed: "I'm in love with you" with further subtle intimations of impatience sexual desire followed by Superman evoking his own noli me tangere (i.e., touch me not) instructions because he was not quite ready for intimate contact just then. This curious two-sided love triangle, this personal menage a trois between Lois Lane, Clark Kent and Superman was

now resolved into heterosexual normalcy, which subsequently climaxed in the Fortress of Solitude.

**3.1.5** The dual good-girl/bad-girl nature of Mary Magdalene resonated with Lois Lane's good-girl/bad-girl behaviours on-screen. This was most graphically symbolised in *S2* concerning her health. Lois demonstrated a dual fanaticism about the vitamin benefits of freshly squeezed orange juice, which she impatiently proceeded to make in her office. However, she was also simultaneously smoking a cigarette (in a classic "bad-girl" fag-sucking pose) before stubbing it out into a very congested ashtray (i.e., dramatic evidence of a very unhealthy lifestyle). In *SI*, Lois actually wanted a greasy hamburger with everything on it, plus freshly squeezed orange juice for her 9.00 am breakfast!

**3.1.6** Superman, especially as the lovelorn, alter ego Clark Kent, is romantically attached to Lois Lane. This narrative thread resonated with the many extra-canonical stories of Mary Magdalene being the secret lover of Jesus.<sup>47</sup> This lover thematic was prefigured when Lois absent-mindedly asked Superman the double-entendre question: "How big are you?" (i.e., not "How tall are you"). The sex theme was symbolically introduced again during their flying sequence when "Superman takes Lois over the Statue of Liberty [which] cleverly indicates to adult viewers - precocious children - that it's an allegory for a prolonged orgasm."<sup>48</sup> This

scene is "quite genuinely erotic...one remembers Freud's insistence that dreams of flight are dreams of sexual intercourse."<sup>49</sup>

**3.1.7** Indeed, if we take a text-as-reader-construct approach to this sexual thematic within *S2*, then its erotic trajectory can be even more dramatically extended in at least seven ways, ranging from the symbolic, to the metaphoric, to the realistic, if one had a mind to do so. For example:

(a) Critical plot events take place in Paris which is famous for being "the most romantic city of the world,"<sup>50</sup> so what better world capital to pursue an erotic theme within. Metaphoric sexual symbolism was also utilised via the phallic-looking Eiffel Tower, which was repeatedly shot in all its huge, erect beauty.

(b) Continuing this erotic metaphor was an excited Lois Lane who (again) wore pink clothing (i.e., the iconic colour for girls and innocent love), presumably along with her pink underwear from *S1*. In her passionate pursuit of adventure, she was intimately attached to the erect Eiffel Tower. She located herself on the outside of the cable car (sperm packet?) riding the Tower up and down uncontrollably (mechanical masturbation?). At one point during the boxcar's descent (deep penetration?), Lois has a look of overwhelmed abandonment (temporary loss of control during sexual

passion?), especially as the boxcar is rapidly falling (intense, vigorous penetration?). When Superman (her lover?) physically arrived on the scene (consciously focused?), he communicated, detached, comforted and embraced Lois (romance responses?). Then he manually pushed the box car (autoerotism?) up the metal tower (penis?) one more time until it violently erupted (ejaculation?) from the top of its knob-like metal assembly (penis head?). The H-bomb on board then exploded in a spectacular light display (orgasm?) that momentarily disorientated Superman, literally blowing him away (temporary loss of conscious control?). He stabilised, reorientated himself (gained sexual control?), and then safely returned to Earth (joyous sexual satisfaction?). No scene of Superman reporting his experiences to friends (sexual bragging?) was recorded, but Lois would repeatedly daydream about Superman (erotic reminiscing; to generate further sexual anticipatory excitement?).

(c) However, unlike their previous metaphoric sexual flying near the Statue of Liberty in *SI*, this time, Superman's and Lois's unplanned and unprotected metaphoric sex had a disturbing unintended consequence. The concussion shock wave (good vibration?) of the exploded (orgasmic?) H-bomb travelled through the inky darkness of space (womb?) and penetrated (fertilised?) the cosmic Kryptonian prison (egg?) containing the evil

triumvirate (an ovum full of unexpressed life?). This contact (sexual consummation?) resulted in the violent release (birth?) of its malevolent contents (evil black triplets?), and their subsequent aberrant behaviours thereafter (rebelliousness?) which was certainly in need of super-level control (stern parenting?). How much of this metaphoric sexual trajectory was deliberately planned is uncertain, but it is not beyond the realms of scriptwriting possibility.

(d) The sexual thematic was again prefigured, if somewhat more directly this time, when Clark Kent and Lois Lane posed as the newly weds Mr. and Mrs. Smith at the Niagara Falls love-nest, the Honeymoon Haven. Especially with its intimate flames of love, huge vibrating bed and Clark's excitedly hopeful discussions about their forthcoming sleeping arrangements while undercover for the *Daily Planet*. (This was another sex-related newspaper story that involved Lois Lane as a Mary Magdalene-figure).

(e) Lois's sexuality was non-metaphorically highlighted again in the Fortress of Solitude super-pad when she changed her clothes and returned wearing a translucent negligee with a noticeable pubic shadow. Both Superman and the audience could see through her obvious sexual intent.

(f) The sexual theme was further reinforced during the Fortress's Kryptonian bed scene, in which it is strongly hinted (but not actually shown, especially in pneumatic gyration fashion) that Superman had physically consummated his love for Lois. Neither do the Scriptures contain any direct references to such sexual events, even for Jesus, the fully human Son of man (Matt. 17:9; Mark 14:62; Luke 9:58; John 12:23). The looks of satisfaction on Superman and Lois's contented faces conveyed this erotic conclusion, but this indirect approach is understandable given the film's family focus and appeal.

(g) Superman and Lois's intimate relationship was further reinforced when Lex Luthor (Gene Hackman) referred to the couple as the "best of friends" and implied an intimate sexual relationship via his tone of voice when he reported to the unholy triumvirate. Consequently, Ursa (Sarah Douglas) grabbed Lois as a hostage and took her to the Fortress of Solitude to lure Superman. While doing so, she referred to Lois as "his favourite," a phrase which itself implied a concubinal relationship between Superman and Lois.

### **3.2 Lois Lane as the Apostle Peter**

Lois Lane also enacted Apostle Peter-like behaviour. Just as the excited-cum-doubting Peter nearly drowned while miraculously walking on water with



Jesus (Matt. 14:28-31), the excited-cum-nervous Lois Lane nearly fell out of the sky while miraculously flying among the clouds with Superman. In any case, both events were miracles by earthly standards. Indeed, both ancient and contemporary believing protagonists moved dangerously in downward directions. However, in a timely fashion, Peter was rescued by Jesus (Matt. 14:31) and Lois was rescued by Superman. Personally, Lois Lane's ambitious, spunky, go-getter reporter brashness was just like the Apostle Peter's impulsive brashness (John 18:10). Similarly, Peter was the bedrock of the Christian faith who was given the keys of the kingdom (Matt. 16:18-19), and was thus an intimate confidant of Jesus who received privileged revelations and holy love from him (Matt. 17:1-2; Mark 9:2-3). Whereas, Lois was the feisty journalistic champion of Superman for both the *Daily Planet* and Metropolis as a whole, who subsequently warranted his trust, and was later given the precious gift of his secret identity, and then physical love, in *S2*.

### 3.3 Lois Lane as Adam and Beyond

When Superman and Lois are magically flying together, during a key moment their fingertips barely touch and the "close shot of hands in this position looks like the hands of Adam and God on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Afterwards, Lois thinks to herself with awe, "Here I am, holding hands with a God."<sup>51</sup> Both filmic action and dialogue resonated with this Western iconic image of divinity meeting humanity as most famously represented in Michelangelo

Buonarroti's *The Creation of Adam*.<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, director Richard Donner had originally shot a God-Adam scene for *S2*, but it got edited out by his replacement director Richard Lester. This scene was to show the depowered Superman being beaten to a pulp in a road dinner, and thus was barely able to return to the Fortress of Solitude. However, once inside, Jor-El reached through the void towards an unconscious Clark to help him. As scriptwriter Tom Mankiewicz claimed: "It's God touching the hand of Adam as Jor-El touches his son and rejuvenates him, and 'kills' himself by expelling the last of his energy."<sup>53</sup> Killing Jor-El the God-figure for a second time (the first occurred during Krypton's destruction) would have been overkill, and was mercifully eliminated.

### **3.4 Jimmy Olsen as an Apostle/Holy Disciple**

In addition to Lois Lane, Superman's other true believer was Jimmy Olsen (Marc McClure), the cub photographer for the *Daily Planet*. He was both Lois Lane and Clark Kent's co-worker who "could be seen as Peter or Paul?,"<sup>54</sup> especially given both Apostles' ability to create incredible word-pictures of Jesus's deeds within the Gospels and elsewhere. Olson's newspaper pictures would functionally do the same thing. Interestingly, Superman forsook other citizens caught in the rocket-induced earthquake in *S1*, including stranding Jimmy Olsen on the desolate highway to help Lois Lane who was alone on a deserted back-road. This act resonated with Jesus's parable (Luke 15:4) of the good shepherd (Superman) who

would leave the ninety-nine sheep in the wilderness (Olsen and the earthquake victims) in order to find the lost one (Lois).

### **Conclusion**

There are so many biblical references and symbolic religious resonances that one playfully wonders where all the science fiction is located within these two classic SF films! However, if secular films with sacred subtexts, that is, "overtly religious themes in a secular 'wrapper'"<sup>55</sup> can lead one to critically (re-)examine the Bible, then so be it! Studying Superman can serve the same instructive purpose as formal Scripture Study in Religious Education classes. Not as a replacement for the divine word, but rather, as an aesthetic aide to religious contemplation, as a visual piety beachhead for experimental religious discourse. As Gary Engle argued, Superman "can serve as a safe, nonsectarian focus for essentially religious sentiments, particularly amongst the young... [even if only as] an American boy's fantasy of a messiah."<sup>56</sup>

However, it is of little "matter that Superman is not an overtly religious figure and that St. Clark of Krypton preaches a secular gospel"<sup>57</sup> for "the Superman legend [is] a mainstay of American popular culture."<sup>58</sup> One merely needs to develop new postmodern eyes and ears to perceive (Ezek. 44:5) these sacred subtexts, not as new wine in new bottles (Matt. 9:17), but rather, as old wine in new bottles.

Further research into this fascinating field is highly recommended and to be encouraged, especially in this post-Millennial age of the moving image.

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<sup>1</sup> Kozlovic, 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *S1* is the default film when discussing narrative episodes. *S2* will be mentioned specifically as appropriate. The various TV, video, special editions and DVD versions of *S1* and *S2* vary considerably, but will not be discussed herein.

<sup>3</sup> Bruce, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Anderson, 1983, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> Lederman, 1979, p. 237.

<sup>6</sup> Terrell, 1984, p. 90.

<sup>7</sup> Schickel, 1991, p. 194.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, Grist & Dowling, 1992, p. 136.

<sup>9</sup> Petrou, 1978, p. 67.

<sup>10</sup> For multiple examples see Bernard, 1988.

<sup>11</sup> Petrou, 1978, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> All scriptural quotations refer to the Authorised King James Version of the Bible.

<sup>13</sup> Owen, Grist & Dowling, 1992, p. 14.

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, 1979, p. 63.

<sup>15</sup> Skerry & Lambert, 1988, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Malone, 1988, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> Mehok, 1988, p. 128.

<sup>18</sup> Kozloff, 1981, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> Pei, Ramondino & Torbet, 1974, p. 124.

<sup>20</sup> Shapiro, 1994, p. 374.

<sup>21</sup> Engle, 1988, pp. 86-87.

<sup>22</sup> Lederman, 1979, p. 238.

<sup>23</sup> Short, 1983, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> Petrou, 1978, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Petrou, 1978, p. 73.

<sup>26</sup> Bruce, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Broderick, 1976, p. 269.

<sup>28</sup> Kozloff, 1981, p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> Broderick, 1976, p. 269.

<sup>30</sup> Harrington, 2001, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Nash & Ross, 1987, p. 3221.

<sup>32</sup> Bruce, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> Kozloff, 1981, pp. 78-79.

<sup>34</sup> Kozloff, 1981, pp. 78-79.

<sup>35</sup> Williams, 1990, p. 339.

<sup>36</sup> Daniels, 1998, p. 44.

<sup>37</sup> Daniels, 1998, p. 71.

<sup>38</sup> Williams, 1990, p. 283.

<sup>39</sup> David, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Petrou, 1978, p. 142.

<sup>41</sup> Lederman, 1979, p. 239.

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<sup>42</sup> Kozloff, 1981, p. 79.

<sup>43</sup> Gibson, 1981, p. 91.

<sup>44</sup> Petrou, 1978, pp. 81, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Kozloff, 1981, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> Engle, 1988, p. 85.

<sup>47</sup> For example see Thiering, 1993, chpt. 17.

<sup>48</sup> Shipman, 1985, p. 142.

<sup>49</sup> Nicholls, 1984, p. 170.

<sup>50</sup> Ahem, 2001, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Lederman, 1979, p. 242.

<sup>52</sup> Bernard, 1988, pp. 20-21.

<sup>53</sup> Harrington & Kavitsky, 2000, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> Kozloff, 1981, p. 81.

<sup>55</sup> Ellis, 2001, p. 304.

<sup>56</sup> Engle, 1988, pp. 86-87.

<sup>57</sup> Mehok, 1988, p. 129.

<sup>58</sup> Skerry & Lambert, 1988, p. 63.

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